

Pentagon Can Pay for War Through June

Thursday April 19, 2007 10:16 PM

By ANDREW TAYLOR

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) - The Pentagon says it has enough money to pay for the Iraq war through June, despite warnings from the White House that troops are being harmed by Congress' failure to quickly deliver more funds.

The Army is taking a series of "prudent measures" aimed at making sure delays in the bill financing the war do not harm troop readiness, according to instructions sent to Army commanders and budget officials April 14.

The House is slated Thursday to name its negotiators on the war funding bill with the intent of producing a House-Senate compromise next week. President Bush has promised to veto the bill over its timelines for troop withdrawal, and Democrats hope to send a second bill acceptable to Bush sometime in May.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid told reporters Thursday he thinks the war cannot be won with military force and only through diplomatic, political and economic means.

"I believe myself that the secretary of state, secretary of defense and - you have to make your own decisions as to what the president knows - (know) this war is lost and the surge is not accomplishing anything as indicated by the extreme violence in Iraq yesterday," said Reid, D-Nev.

While \$70 billion provided by Congress in September for military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan has mostly run out, the Army has instructed department officials to slow the purchase of nonessential repair parts and other supplies, restrict the use of government charge cards, and limit travel.

The Army also will delay contracts for facilities repair and environmental restoration, according to instructions issued by Army Comptroller Nelson Ford. Ford said the accounting moves are "similar to those enacted last year" when Congress failed to deliver a war funding bill to Bush until mid-June.

More stringent steps would be taken in May, such as a hiring freeze and firing temporary employees, but exceptions are made for any war-related activities or anything that "would result immediately in the degradation of readiness standards" for troops in Iraq or those slated for deployment.

Training of Army Guard and Reserve units not scheduled for deployment has been paused, but training of regular Army units won't be affected until late May or later. Nor will maintenance at Army depots.

Army commanders, however, have been instructed to prioritize training and maintenance operations in the event some may need to be delayed.

White House Deputy Press Secretary Dana Perino has called such steps ``painful and unacceptable." The Army's assessment wasn't as dire.

``These actions, while extreme in ordinary times, are prudent measures necessary to mitigate late enactment" of the war funding measure, Ford said in the April 14 memorandum obtained by The Associated Press.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates wrote lawmakers April 11 to warn that ``the Army faces a real and serious funding problem that will ... inevitably, negatively impact readiness and Army personnel and their families."

At the same time, the White House has issued almost daily warnings about the consequences of delays in getting the Iraq funding bill to Bush's desk. Perino said Wednesday that ``the troops desperately need the money."

Such pronouncements were scarce when the GOP-controlled Congress was tardy in providing war dollars last year. At the time, there was a warning about ``serious impacts" if the money were delayed further, but it came in a little-noticed letter from the White House budget office.

Congress ignored the warning and went on its Memorial Day vacation.

The administration says the dynamic is different this year because of the increased pace of the war and uncertainty as to when the influx of funds will be passed in a form Bush will sign into law.

``Enactment of the (war funding bill) is not guaranteed," Ford wrote, instructing commanders to make plans for ``more severe" spending restrictions that would have an impact on Army war-related operations.